

Their slender-

147 ness is deceptive, for their great strength lies
[482] in their legs, back, and neck, seen in their
ability to carry loads of 45 kilograms (100 lbs.)
and upwards, all day up and down hill without
undue fatigue. Hair form is straight,
142 coarse, and black. Gray hair or baldness are
very unusual. Body hair, as far as could be
observed, is negative.

143 As many as 99.56 per cent of Tzeltal be-
long to blood type O, which is one of the
highest frequencies registered in the Ma-
yance area. According to Matson and Swan-
son (1959, p. 50), "In general the more
143 isolated peoples such as the Lacandon, Tzel-
144 tal, Tzotzil and Cakchiquel show the high-
est frequency of the O gene." This condition
is attributed to the absence of racial mix-
ture.

CULTURAL CONFIGURATION

621 Like the Indians in the highlands of Gua-
[171] temala (Tax, 1937), the Tzeltal group them-
selves in communities which are distinct
social and cultural units, as is characteristic
621 of the tribe. Each community has its well-
184 defined lands, its own dialect forms, wear-
ing apparel, kinship system, politico-relig-
ious organization, economic resources,
crafts, and other cultural features. Any na-
tive of the region finds it easy to identify
the origin of other Indians by noting their
speech, wearing apparel, or the goods they
621 sell. Solidarity between the members of
each community is strong and becomes
manifest in times of conflict with outside
groups or in their way of gathering accord-
ing to their "nationality" on fiestas or mar-
ket days when people of other communities
attend. On the other hand, no ethnic solidar-
ity whatsoever exists. Each community re-
stricts itself to its own affairs and nothing
else; whatever happens to the other Tzeltal
communities is something altogether apart.

621 The territorial limits of these communi-
632 ties do not always coincide with those of
[171] the municipalities, as in Guatemala. Var-
ious well-defined communities exist (in the
terms described above) which belong to

[P. 197-A]

778 natural elements (hail, wind, storms),
821 which often threaten and destroy the corn-
823 fields.

Distribution of Huts

621 In the parajes as well as in the centers
the tendency to cluster huts in patrilineal
nuclei is strong. One perceives this tendency
also where lineage or clan ties still persist
(Oxchuc).

[594] The majority of households consist of
the elementary family, a couple and their
342 offspring. The habitations include a hut,
343 which serves as dormitory and kitchen, plus
[417] chicken coop, pigpen, and, sometimes, the
temascal (*pus*) used for steam baths.

343 Among industrious families another small
hut serves exclusively as a kitchen. Seldom
417 does a fence separate this nucleus from its
neighbors, but it may protect a vegetable
patch from animals. In the capital, however,
each family must fence its lot.

Relationships between Communities

628 Communities establish commercial and
other ties according to their ecological dis-
tribution and cultural condition. In the
southern zone, Amatenango and Aguacate-
nango form a kind of unit, based on physi-
cal proximity and cultural affinity. Their
residents meet frequently at the Sunday
market of Teopisca. In the central zone,
Oxchuc, Tenejapa, Cancuc, and Tenango,
which more or less share ways of life and
natural environment, form another informal
association, contacts resulting from the
weekly markets of Tenejapa and Yochib. In
the northern zone, Sitala and Guaquitepec
form another unit. Ocosingo, Chilon, and
Yajalon are centers of commercial and po-
litical importance, occupied largely by La-
dinos but used as trade centers by Indians
throughout the northern zone.

4/2 TECHNOLOGY

Tools and Techniques

Farming tools are the most important: axe

[P 205-B]

13| the Guatemala border, which it overlaps at Gracias á Dios. They
10| do not reach the highest part of the mountains. For the most part,
they live in isolated tribal groups, although in some places, notably
in Ocosingo Valley, they are attached to *haciendas* and *fincas*. Much
of the easternmost country marked in the maps as belonging to them
and the Chol is actually uninhabited wilderness, or, if occupied at
all, is Lacandone territory.

10| Their immediate neighbours of the Highlands are the Zotzil and
197| Chaneabal. The former speak a language differentiated from Tzel-
tal only by a shift of *a*, *e*, and *b* to Zotzil *o*, *i*, and *m*, respectively.*
Chaneabal is spoken by a small group near Comitán. The people
of that place say that the language is simply Tzeltal influenced by
Mames contact. The list given in Appendix III, seems to bear this
out. To the north, and around Tumbalá, are the Chol Indians, whose
language is quite distinct, but, of all the other Mayance tongues,
probably the nearest to the Highland group.

197| The language itself has been variously named Cendal, Tzendal,
Cendales, Tzentel, and Tzeltal. I have taken the latter form, as
it most nearly represents the Indians' own form, *ts'eltal*, varied in
careless speech to *tceltal*. The villages are spoken of as tribes, be-
cause each one forms a separate, self-governing unit. There is no
evidence of cohesion within the language-group as a whole save
• 628 during certain periods of uprisings. Individual villages may re-
semble tribes of another speech more closely than they do those of
104| their own. The Mexican spelling of Tzeltal names is given first,
followed by the phonetic spelling (See Appendix III), and the
translation, if known.

101| The Bachajon live on the threshold of the pine country. Their
131| farms may be found hidden away in the thick jungle land of ma-
137| hogany and palms, through which their little hidden trails lead to
houses tucked away out of sight of alien travelers. Altogether, they
161| are estimated at five thousand families, but it is doubtful whether
evidences of more than fifty farms could be seen by one passing
along the trail through the heart of their country. The capital,
Bachajon Village, is among the pines. There, periodically, the
648| Spaniards used to round them up, that they might be more easily
policed, and for the benefit of the church established there. Once
346| there was a fine, stone church and a neat Cabildo with white walls,
colonnade, and tiled roof. Both have been wrecked by the Indians,
344| apparently because they did not like to be reminded of alien domina-
tion, for from the wreckage of the old church, they took tiles to
roof their new one, and they have a straw-thatched Cabildo for the
Maestro, or government agent.

*Starr (1903) quoting Sanchez (1890).

The country near the village has been farmed out long ago; now the fields lie at a distance in the jungle. After every concentration, the Indians drift away again like blown smoke. Today most of the houses are rotten, sagging, with gaping doors. The paths are grown up with weeds, huge, old moss-covered crosses lean at crazy angles by the main trails. Over all broods the frame of the sacked church, huge stone walls with rank vegetation around them, and a twisted, unhealthy oak-tree on one side, like a composition by Piranesi.

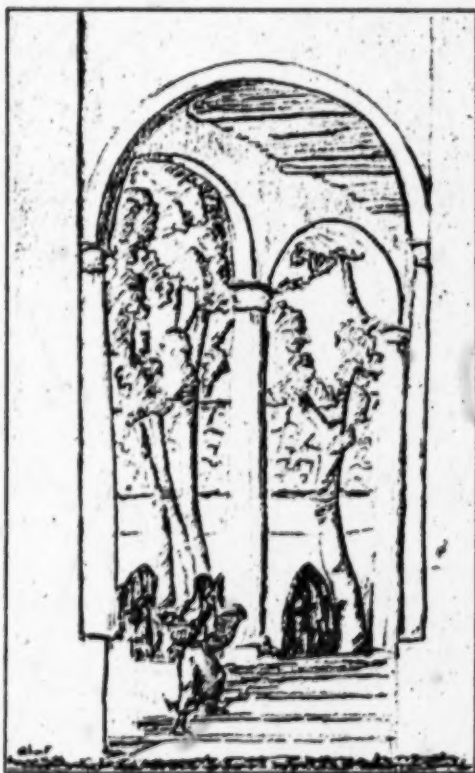


FIG. 277—Ocosingo, Chié. Colonnade on the Plaza.

Ocosingo Valley and its neighbours furnish a transition towards the real highlands. The valleys are fertile and green, ringed in with ranges of steep, rich hills. The soil in the lower parts is light; here palms and pines grow together, with a luxuriance of rich grass that makes an ideal grazing country. Through the valleys are large and small ranches of Ladinos and old Spanish families. The bigger ones, such as San Antonio, Quechil, and Achin in the Ocosingo Valley, San José Reforma and El Real beyond the San José Pass, and Tecojá in its own valley, each has a village of Indian labourers attached to them. The natives' houses are rather

better than the average, and often tile-roofed (fig. 278). The Indians of each ranch function more or less as a tribe, governed by the owner of the ranch, conducting their own worship at its chapel. A few Indians own scattered, independent farms. Sivacá (sivacá ha', "Gunpowder Water"), near Ocosingo on the trail to Tenango, is a true village, self-governing, with its own *alcalde*, under the supervision of a Ladino *maestro*. All these groups come together at

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796 certain times of the year for ceremonies, such as those at Chakalchib, and formerly at Campomtik, to be mentioned later. The Bachajon hold their own ceremonies at their village.

141 Physically, the Tzeltal, like all the Mayance Indians, are short,
142 averaging probably about 160 centimeters (5 feet, 4 inches) for the
147 men, and slightly less for the women. Their build is slender, with
stringy muscles, except for a good development of the calves. Hands
and feet are small and well-formed. Their slenderness is
deceptive, for their great strength lies in their legs, back, and neck,
seen in their ability to carry loads of 45 kilograms (100 lbs.) and
upwards, all day up and down hill without undue fatigue. Taking
in a tump-line a load under which they cannot rise from the floor.

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FIG. 276.—Finca Tecojá, Chis. Houses of Indians attached to the Finca.

147 without help, they will carry it with ease. The lifting power of their
arms is less than that of Americans or Ladinos. Their headform is
142 meso- to brachycephalic, and the cranium is small. Deformation in
[304] the shape of a marked depression just above the juncture of the hair-
line and the forehead, due to the use of a tump-line from early in-
fancy, may be responsible for the conical appearance of the top of
the skull. Noses are, on the whole, mesorrhine and small, with little
appearance of the famous "Maya Nose," and then in a narrow form,
lacking the width of nostril seen in pre-historic figures. Prognathism
is slight, alveolar prognathism being the more common, particularly
in children. Hair form is straight, coarse, and black. Gray hair or
baldness are very unusual. Body hair, as far as could be observed,

out by a small group bearing a grudge, although in this case the tribe as a whole stands more solidly back of the offenders. 648

The Bachajón exhibit internal dissension and strife to an unusual degree. There are many small, outlying sub-groups, some of which are more or less openly at war with the main body. In the description of Zona Sala oil camp (Chapter VIII) something has already been said of the settlement there of men driven away on account of the misbehaviour. They still call themselves Bachajón and maintain some slight intercourse with the tribe, although they are quite inimical in their attitude towards Indians passing through on the way to Palenque. There are other such settlements in different parts of the jungle, although these, having most recently split off, are the most hostile. 628

What group loyalty the Bachajón have centers around the deserted village that bears their name. It was described at the beginning of this chapter. Founded under compulsion, deserted whenever possible, its church and Cabildo in ruins, none the less it is their focal point, jealously guarded from intrusion. These Indians have had the same experience as our own; the European comes first as a visitor, then a few settle for trade, then comes a host in their footsteps, until soon there is no place for the Indian, and he finds himself an intruder in his own home. Against this sequence of events, so common in our history, the Bachajón protect their land by an attitude of unremitting hostility. Travellers may pass through, but no trader may set up even a lean-to bower under which to display his wares, save during the few days of their main fiestas, although it would be a great convenience for them to have a store nearer than Ocosingo. 621 609

The destruction of the Spanish-built church and Cabildo, with the substitution for them of native edifices, is curious. The feeling probably is that when they do congregate in their capital for a fiesta, they do not wish to be confronted by evidences of alien domination. 829

The strongest actual unit is that of the individual family, the man, his wife, and children. Indians who are forced, for one reason or another, to go into hiding in the jungle, will run great risks to return and fetch their wives and children. Even beyond this smallest group there is a little feeling, a man's relatives by marriage or blood often joining to support him in a feud, or to revenge a wrong done him. Similarly, the relatives of the individual who committed the wrong are held in some degree liable to punishment, although there is no formal rule of collective responsibility, the action taken depending largely on individual inclination. 593 594 602 627 [672]

Traditional Economic Activities

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hilltop with a digging stick. He knelt and prayed, asking for rain. At that very moment, the rain came. He put the seeds in the holes he made, and from then on people have been planting in the hills.

Other saints are charged with providing rainfall. The saint of greatest importance in this respect is Santo Tomás, the patron saint of Oxchuk. Some Indians have gone to the church there to light a candle and ask for rain, and on their return the rains came. During an extended drought in August 1967, over one hundred people walked to Oxchuk to pray for rain. The people of Tzo'ontahal are somewhat bitter about the Oxchuqueños' neglect of Santo Tomás since over half of the town has converted to Protestantism. Whenever there is a drought, they blame it on the failure of the people of Oxchuk to take care of Santo Tomás.

In addition to the Catholic saints, the ancestor spirits help man to watch over the land. They are responsible for giving the rains in the planting period and early growing season. The fiesta on the Day of the Cross (Chapter 1) is primarily a plea for rain. Until the 1950s, the curers would hold a celebration at the Cave of the Ancestors to ask for rain during a drought. The waning belief in the presence of the ancestor spirits in the town has meant that there is less attention given to such fiestas. Some go to seek the ancestors in Chiapa de Corzo in the cave in which they are supposed to reside, as the following story illustrates:

One time my three brothers-in-law went to Chiapas to ask the ancestors for better crops. When they arrived there, nobody knew where the cave was. They said only a certain mayordomo there could find it.

Another time, two of the prayer-reciters went to the cave. They talked to the guard of the cave, saying, "May we speak to our ancestors?" The guard said, "Are you prepared? Did you bring two liters of trago? The ancestors like to drink."

The prayer-reciters went to get two liters of trago and all three drank it. While they were drinking, they saw a cow and chickens appear. The guardian said that if they came back in May with "food" for the ancestors—candles, incense, and firecrackers—they would get rich crops. I think the prayer-reciters succeeded because now they have a cow and chickens and a horse. They are afraid of the envy of their neighbors.

- 628 • People with lands in hot country recount that during droughts the In-
796 dians from the neighboring town of Chamula have held rainmaking fies-
782 tas for which they solicit contributions from other Indians.

821 *The Chamulteco came to us and said, "Let all of us who have milpas*
731 *contribute five pesos for a fiesta." He brought the candles. In the little hill*
there the people brought drums and flute. We ate chickens and drank li-
quor. For eleven hours he prayed, and in the afternoon it rained.

- 628 The *kurikenik*, rural inhabitants of the colonia of San Vicente who
241 migrated to Amatenango from Chanal, have no irrigated lands and de-
796 pend directly on rainfall throughout the growing season. Indians of the
782 center know of their practice of sticking their digging sticks into the
ground with the points toward the sky "to puncture the clouds" when
they have planted their milpa, but they do not imitate this practice. Con-
trol over the supply of water in the irrigated lands has apparently led to
the neglect of supernatural appeals even where the canals do not supply
water. Under pressure of extended drought, they will resort to spiritual in-
tercession through Chamula or Oxchuk practitioners in whom they have
some faith.

241 Acquiring the protection of the gods does not obviate the practical activ-
796 ities necessary in the cultivation of crops. Fiestas for the saints are a repay-
782 ment for services rendered in watching over the milpa. The sponsorship of
796 fiestas for the saints by the community ensures the protection for all of the
crops, and general crop failure due to drought or high winds is explained
as a result of mismanagement of these community-wide fiestas. The offer-
ing of candles to the spiritual owner of one's own milpa is a kind of indi-
vidual insurance policy for future crops as well as a repayment for the gift
of the corn harvest. The peasant notion of surplus value is implicit in this
reciprocal relation: the payment, or gift, of two candles to the milpa spirit
is far less than the value of the harvest. But the account is balanced by the
expenditure of this surplus in communal fiestas.

POTTERY PRODUCTION

- 323 Making pottery has been a speciality of the town since pre-Conquest
178 days. The old site of the town contains sherds of pottery which is remarka-
172 bly similar in texture, design, and form to
the pottery made now.

Chapter 7

The Formal Organization
of Local Government

The formal organization of civil and religious offices in Tzo'ontahal is based on the pattern of a locally independent, democratically elected officialdom introduced by the Spaniards. Variations in the pattern from that of other towns of the highlands have resulted from differences of interpretation of the functions, the range of power, and the course of succession of offices. This flexibility has preserved structural continuity as organizational adjustments are made. The Indians have transformed an alien governing mechanism into one that meets their changing needs and contributes to their independence in the modern world.

The independence of the local township has a base in the pre-Conquest social organization of Chiapas. Robert Adams (1961:347) has noted the absence of architectural or other features indicative of functional specialization that would arise in a politically integrated region. At the time of the Conquest, Chiapas was divided into warring principalities, revealing the extreme political fragmentation of the area (Calnek 1962:8). Each town was divided from the neighboring town by *mojones*, hilled-up boundaries (ibid:36). A minimum of political unity was achieved by holding certain towns subject to the dominance of others (ibid:37); local autonomy persisted, however, in the administration of landholding as a community enterprise.

During the colonial period the Spanish Crown established the independence of towns directly under their control and provided them with a civil-religious hierarchy which has persisted as the form of government to the present (Carrasco 1961: Wolf 1957b).

Comparative studies of the civil-religious hierarchy indicate the range of

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doctors and officers of the National Indian Institute (INI) who arrive to the villages at irregular intervals. In Amatenango, the INI has established a "clinic" in which a native nurse provides some medical services, such as vaccinations, the selling of aspirin, etc., while in Aguacatenango the native INI nurse provides services in his home.

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In both the villages the INI has established a cooperative store which sells staples which are not produced in the community, but such stores are in no sense agents of cultural change, selling only commodities which the Indians habitually buy elsewhere. (A reason for the lack of success of such stores is that the Indians have not understood the "cooperative" principle, very few men have joined, and they are disillusioned with the marginal profit obtained through them.) In 1958, Amatenango had water piped into the village, a project completed by the INI in 1957; while after the author left Aguacatenango in 1958, water pipes were installed there.

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Political relations with the Ladinos of a more formal nature occur through the courts of justice and national government offices, and they are characterized by the covert (and at times open) hostility and misunderstanding on the part of both Indians and Ladinos (see D. Metzger, 1956 and Fuente, Julio de la, 1958).

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Relations with other Indian villages are common both for Amatenango and Aguacatenango. They trade with the communities located in different ecological zones the products that do not grow in their territory (ocote from the highlands, sugar cane from the lowlands, etc.) in exchange for their own products and they

628 establish with them the relations of posada and compadrazgo, men-
 438 tioned above, as well as (in the infrequent cases of inter-com-
 571 munity marriage), some affinal kinship ties. In the few recorded
 608 cases of emigration from the village, some members of the com-
 582 munity keep communication with a few consanguineal relatives living
 628 in other Indian villages, although social exchanges and the memory
 166 of such relatives tend to die out after a generation or two.
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105 With the other Indian communities in the area, Amatenango
 and Aguacatenango share a common material culture and belief
 system, derived from a Highland Maya cultural tradition, the same
 linguistic background, and a subsistence pattern based on agri-
 culture. They are peasant, in the sense that they are rural vil-
 lages which depend, for survival, not only on agricultural work,
 but on economic exchange with other semi-urban and urban centers
 (Redfield, 1956:25-28).

438 Aguacatenango buys pottery and chavotes from Amatenango,
 [273] whose women come periodically to sell them, and trago (drinking
 alcohol) which some Amatenangueros produce illegally. Amatenango
 buys from Aguacatenango surplus corn.

628 The two towns have amicable relations, thinking of each
 [311] other as neighbors, and sharing the same pasture lands, and
 [312] source of water for irrigation. The two communities share the
 628 same cultural hero, called Juan Lopez in Aguacatenango and Lopez
 776 Shuntón in Amatenango, connected with the corn and with the
 "lightening who lives in a cave." For Aguacatenangueros this
 personage is the builder of the roads, responsible for the erad-
 ication of "cannibalism," the conversion of man-hunting animals

• 628 into mild forest beasts, the peace made with the "kings of Guate-
796 mala" and the opening of trade with Comitán. He is also in both communities a powerful nahual (supernatural being controlled by the witches or a witch himself), and in Amatenango everyone prays to him on the day of the Santa Cruz (May 3). Both communities agree that he was "an Amatenanguero, born somewhere in the direction of Chiapa de Corzo." There are no compadre relations established between the two villages, but two cases of intermarriage [608] and two of posada relations have been reported (Verbitsky, 1939a). [582]

Both towns criticize the other for its "costumbres," criticisms which are related directly, as will be shown later, to some differences in social structure which will be discussed in this work. Amatenango women criticize Aguacatenango women as being lazy but mistreated by their husbands who make them gather their own firewood, and because they run away from their husbands seeking work in San Cristobal. Aguacatenango men criticize Amatenangueros for being lazy and not seeking work in the fincas, preferring to hunt rats in the cornfields, and their women for being dirty and authoritarian.

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2) Extending the rights of usufruct in the already available communal lands which are still covered with timber.

3) Petitioning the Ejido Commission if there are more than twenty individuals without parcels. In this case, the Ejido Commission is responsible for providing land by seeking further expropriation of large latifundios. This, again, is not likely to occur, because the size of the surrounding private properties is smaller, now, than the maximum size permitted by law, and cannot be reclaimed. Many finqueros, in other areas, have large properties which they have managed to keep untouched by registering the land in the name of several family members with separate ownership titles, so each one is smaller than the size permitted by law (Montagu, 1960). If necessary, the government could claim that this practice is illegal. But in the valleys of Aguacatenango and Amatenango this type of finca does not exist, being common only in the more fertile lowland territories such as the area of Ocosingo.

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Some communities in the Chiapas highlands have been expanding their territories by invading the lands of bordering villages, the best example of this being the Chamulas into Huastec land, north of San Cristóbal de las Casas (Pozas, 1959). But in Amatenango and Aguacatenango, although from time to time they have had conflict over the exact boundaries of their territories with other neighboring villages (Pinola, for example), this type of expansion has not occurred. The demands for parcels by the villagers can be met from the already available land because of the

8: Hunt E-4,5 (1958)1962

NV9 Tseltal NV9
Amatenango
Aguacatenango

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423 recent grants of land, and also because the whole region of
621 Amatenango and Aguacatenango has less population pressure than
the overpopulated Chamula area.

Membership

621 In the social dimension, one of the basic features of the
corporate communities of Amatenango and Aguacatenango is their
criteria for membership: to become a member of Amatenango of
Aguacatenango one has to be born in the village, or marry a vil-
lage member.

[166] Contractual membership, although rare, may occur, and has,
[175] but only for Indians, and with consensual acceptance by the whole
community. When the nearby fincas were closed after the Mexican
Revolution, some of the Indian peones attached to them asked for
and obtained land from Amatenango and Aguacatenango and became
full members of these communities with the same rights and duties
as any other community member. Although people can indicate who
is a member of a new or old family, this distinction tends to be
forgotten, even by the families themselves, after the next genera-
tion has been born and married into the village.

628 A man from another Indian community may receive an agri-
621 cultural plot if he makes a petition to the Ayuntamiento, is willing
423 to pay the ejido taxes and the limosna (tax levied against the
[651] household heads to support the expenses of celebration of village
holidays) and a small payment to the Ayuntamiento (20 pesos) for
handling his case. Even then, he has to bring witnesses to testify

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423 to his good conduct, plus demonstrate that he is not able to cultivate within the confines of his own village lands.

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423 Membership in the community requires residence within its territorial boundaries. If a person moves away from the village
166 he loses the attached rights of membership, although at his return he can claim such rights back.

621 Maintenance of membership involves clearly specified duties (e.g., paying communal taxes), and the general obligation of living and acting in agreement with the cultural norms.

Government

All the male members of the community, ideally, and most of them in practice, participate (at some time in their lives) in the government machinery of the village.

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794 Amatenango and Aguacatenango each have two governmental bodies, the Ayuntamiento (or civil body) and the Mayordomias (or religious body). (The distinction between civil and religious is not a sharp one drawn by the community members themselves. It is an analytical device to label the different functions of these two bodies which are clearly separate and require different skills on the part of the incumbents.)

621 The Ayuntamiento deals with secular matters: it administers the land, the relations with the outside world and the village taxations, and is in charge of the maintenance of social control through the application of the native system of justice (as against, and separate from, National or State Mexican law; see Metzger, D., 1956). Among its duties are those of keeping vital statistics for